

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D
ON MARCH 6, 2004
in Baltimore, Maryland

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Docket No. DCA 04 MM015

Sunday,
March 7, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

DENNY L. SCHILLING

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB
MARK HAMMOND
ED NARIZZANO
OFFICER BEAVERS

P R O C E E D I N G S

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MR. TURRELL: Okay. It is now Sunday, and we are at Johns Hopkins Hospital. It is about one in the morning. We are interviewing a witness who was onboard the water taxi in Baltimore Harbor on Saturday. I am joined by the party members of the Coast Guard, the water taxi and the Baltimore Police Department. And I will let the witness introduce himself. Sir?

MR. SCHILLING: My name is Denny L. Schilling. I live at 184 -- I am sorry.

MR. TURRELL: Do you want me to write that down, something --

MR. SCHILLING: Okay.

MR. TURRELL: And your age, sir?

MR. SCHILLING: I am 57.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. I am going to have these party members to introduce themselves.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Lieutenant Commander Mark Hammond, Coast Guard Sector, Baltimore.

MR. NARIZZANO: Ed Narizzano, Director of Seaport Taxi.

OFFICER BEAVERS: Officer Beavers, Baltimore City Police, Southern District.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And with Mr. Schilling,
2 what is your profession, sir?

3 MR. SCHILLING: High school teacher. I
4 retired last June.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And where do you, what
6 city do you reside in, where do you live?

7 MR. SCHILLING: Homewood, Illinois.

8 MR. TURRELL: And what brought you to
9 Baltimore, sir?

10 MR. SCHILLING: Well, my daughter, who is
11 missing, were Corrine, and her boyfriend lives in
12 Vienna, and we had come out to visit her. We tried to
13 see some sights. So, we were visiting Baltimore, his
14 parents drove us in their car and Andrew and Corrine
15 drove in her car. And we went to lunch and then we
16 were going to the Aquarium, but we decided not to,
17 because we had been the Aquarium in Chicago. And none
18 of us had ever been to Fort McHenry, so we decided to
19 go over to the Fort, since it was a pretty nice day.
20 So, it was just a day where our daughter wanted my wife
21 and I to see Baltimore since we had not been up here.

22 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Perhaps you can tell us
23 just how the day unfolded, starting with this morning
24 and just take us through the events?

25 MR. SCHILLING: Sure. Well, we are staying

1 out at the, it escapes me the name of the place, the
2 Suites Hotel in, it starts with an E.

3 MR. TURRELL: Embassy Suites.

4 MR. SCHILLING: Thank you.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

6 MR. SCHILLING: Embassy Suites Hotel in
7 Vienna.

8 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

9 MR. SCHILLING: We stayed there rather than
10 let Andrew's parents because our daughter, Corrine felt
11 that we could spend more time together. And it was not
12 very far from their house anyway. So, we got up and we
13 had breakfast there. And we went over to Andrew's
14 parents' house at 10:30. And Andrew met us there. And
15 we drove up and got here 12ish. Went to City Lights
16 for breakfast, or for lunch, I am sorry. And then kind
17 of browse around the little shops. And then decided
18 it was time to go to the Aquarium because we knew it
19 was, you know, it would take awhile, so we walked over
20 to the Aquarium. This would be like 2:30 by now. And
21 we got in line, but as we were talking, we decided,
22 well, Andrew and Corrine had been to the Aquarium and
23 the Aquarium is okay, but my wife and I are much more
24 history. I taught history for 32 years. So, well, we
25 could go to Fort McHenry and Roccellas, Andrew's

1 parents had not been there either, so, we went, checked
2 out the first taxi, whatever, it was just pulling away,
3 so we went down to the other one, the big one. And it
4 took us over to that little landing, whatever that was.

5 And then we got on this little pontoon boat, which
6 seemed okay, because it wasn't all that, it was small,
7 but at the same time it, you know, it was not that far.

8 And we went over to Fort McHenry.

9 Interestingly enough, maybe prophecy enough, on the way
10 over it was a little rough, and in the floorboard right
11 in front of us on the floor, one of the bolts popped
12 out and water was shooting up in there. And it was
13 kind of like a little spout from a whaler. Which, I
14 mean, I don't think that necessarily had anything to do
15 with the accident, but it was kind of disconcerting to
16 say the least to have a little water spout.

17 So, we got there, and they said that we, that
18 it closed at four, that they would be back at about 10
19 to four. We had about an hour and a half. We watched
20 the movie. Went up, walked around the Fort, and you
21 know, through the various buildings and talked to some
22 of the Civil War enactors that were there, that sort of
23 thing. Came back and Corrine brought a book, and, on
24 the War of 1812 and a Christmas ornament, because she
25 is a little Christmas kid. And we went down and waited

1 for the boat. We were there about 10 minutes and it
2 came it was clearly really dark in the back, but, it
3 came and they hurried us all on. And I remember the
4 guy saying as we were pulling out, because they didn't
5 everybody, there were obviously some lucky people who
6 fortunately for them to miss, I guess. But, I remember
7 him saying we will come back immediately and pick up
8 everybody else. And so we started out, and we had
9 gone maybe just a few minutes and two or three minutes,
10 I don't know, and it started raining and it started
11 getting windy. And it started raining harder and
12 started getting windier and the boat is rocking. And
13 the one guy, not the guy that was steering, the one
14 guy, it was like, you know, kind of looked like the
15 mate or whatever, I remember him saying something like,
16 do you remember that scene in, I forget what movie it
17 was, the guy flashes himself the mast and rides out the
18 storm, I remember somebody else saying, oh, that is
19 real gallows humor.

20 And then it got stronger and stronger and it
21 seemed to me and I don't know, I don't know, I am not a
22 sailor or nothing, but it seemed to me rather than
23 either trying to steer the boat so the back of it was
24 into the, into the wind, in other words, or trying to
25 steer into it so that you were actually facing it, this

1 guy turned the boat, literally, so it with slashing us
2 sideways, and then it flipped over. It took a big
3 like push halfway and kind of bobbed up, and everybody
4 slide to that side, of course, and I grabbed like the
5 window sill behind me, so I didn't slide all the way
6 over, and then it just bobbed and went all the way
7 over. And then it was just, everything was just black
8 and we were under the boat. And, you know, I was just
9 trying to, trying to get out. And I don't know how in
10 the world that happened really. I was reaching up and,
11 you know, took a couple of gulps of water and -- And
12 the next thing I knew I was out up to the side, and
13 there was like a rope on the boat holder there, so I
14 got my arm around that. And I am looking around and
15 there was some people like on top of the thing, it was
16 upside down and they were on top on it. And you know,
17 trying to haul some other people in. And I remember Ed
18 Roccella was on top. He had seen me and he was already
19 on top and he is yelling where are the kids, where are
20 the kids? And then I saw his wife being pulled up and
21 Ed is yelling where are the kids, and I am trying to
22 look under and ducked under and, to try to see, I
23 didn't want to let go, because obviously and I was
24 looking for my wife. But, I couldn't see anything
25 anyway.

1 So, I just kept on holding onto the rope. And
2 then I turned around and I saw my wife about maybe, I
3 don't know, she was out of arm's length. I don't know
4 how far. But, she was, she was far enough away that I
5 couldn't get to her. And luckily the wind was still
6 bobbing the waves and stuff and it kind of kept pushing
7 her my way and she is struggling, so I grabbed her
8 foot, and was able to pull her in. And then I had my
9 arm wrapped around the rope or whatever the heck it
10 was, and they pulled her up on top. So, I just kind of
11 hung on to the side of it, trying to, I was actually, I
12 had gotten one of the life preserver things, and I had
13 that around one arm and had this wrapped around so it
14 was here and I was just holding on. So, and it was
15 bobbing and stuff and it was hard enough to try to get
16 up, so I just stayed there. But, I was looking for the
17 kids. And I couldn't see them obviously. And I don't
18 know what I would have done if I had seen them. I
19 mean, I can't swim, I can swim, but, not in that.

20 And, so I don't know how long we did that.
21 And then the folks on top started trying to wave their
22 arms and yell because they saw the Coast Guard or the
23 police or somebody, the barges coming. In the meantime,
24 we tried to use our cell phones, most of us had our
25 cell phones, but obviously, the water, and those didn't

1 work very well. And I got mine out and immediately
2 lost it. I am sure they won't be able --

3 So, they came with a big barge, and pulled up
4 and finally got kind of hooked onto the thing and it
5 was kind of, it was like, it started out like at a 90
6 degree angle, with the boat, they had the drop thing on
7 the front, and they were trying to, you know, get it
8 and because it was still awfully windy and waving, it
9 kind of slide sideways and I was just holding on to the
10 side. Everybody else was out. And the barge kept
11 coming closer to the other thing, and they are yelling,
12 get you out, and all I could see was this thing coming
13 at me. So, I was lucky enough to get, to get up, they
14 pulled me up on top of the deck, you know, the
15 overturned thing. So, I didn't get crushed.

16 And that took them awhile to get everybody
17 onboard, you know, pulled onto the barge, because it
18 was so rough. I mean, the guys were, the guys were
19 fabulous. I mean, they were working, you can only do so
20 much, putting your own life in danger to try to help
21 somebody. And so they were, you know, they were doing
22 that and they got us onboard. And, and you know, it
23 was just confusion, obviously. And they were looking
24 for other people and they tried to raise the, to flip
25 the boat over so they put, the drop, whatever it is,

1 under the boat to try to flip it over and they did get
2 it lifted up some, and there was, in the meantime, lots
3 of other things were going on. I remember they were
4 trying to pull out a little girl. I don't know what
5 happened to her. I know they got her out. I don't
6 know what happened to her.

7 And, oh, I do remember what happened to her,
8 I asked you about what happened, I think you said that
9 she died. I don't remember.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- in the emergency
11 room.

12 MR. SCHILLING: Okay. Maybe that was what it
13 was. I don't remember.

14 So, oh, then, some of the guys, like two or
15 three of the Coast Guard guys, or whoever they were, I
16 don't know who they were. Coast Guard or who on the
17 barge. When they flipped the boat sort of sideways
18 to try to get, obviously see if there was anybody still
19 in it or whatever, there had been a very large, I don't
20 know, how large she was, but she was pretty big and
21 they were holding, a couple of guys were struggling to
22 try to get her up and she was kind of wedged in the
23 side and stuff. So, they couldn't get her lifted up
24 and so, I tried to help them do that and grabbed her
25 pants and tried to pull her up as well, so there were

1 like four of us trying to pull her up, but she was, you
2 know, she was totally limp and fairly big and wet. And
3 they did finally get her up, finally, they were able to
4 pull her up and they were doing CPR and stuff on her.
5 I don't know whether she made it or not. She didn't
6 look like she, frankly, she didn't look like she was
7 going to make it.

8 So, they looked around for awhile longer
9 trying to see if there was any one they could get to,
10 and of course, the police boats were there by then and
11 so, the Coast Guard, and I don't know who was what.
12 And then they took us back to the, back to the dock,
13 wherever it was, the Armory or whatever. And they did
14 the, what do they call it MASH, triage.

15 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

16 MR. SCHILLING: Yes. They did the triage
17 stuff there. And they put me and my wife, well, by
18 that time I mean I was just, you know, I was just cold.
19 I was not, have any injuries. But, my wife was
20 hypothermia and so they were trying to get her warm.
21 And then Ed Roccella's wife, had hurt her shoulder and
22 I don't know, and she was also hypothermia. And I
23 think, downstairs there is, I saw it, and I think her
24 shoulder was just displaced and had a crack. I am not
25 sure. It wasn't broken. I don't think, maybe it is, I

1 don't know. I haven't seen her since a few hours ago.

2 And they brought us to Johns Hopkins. And
3 the folks here have been, there is a reason this
4 hospital has a reputation it has. These folks are
5 wonderful. And the police, I mean, and, and, you know,
6 I asked for a priest, and a priest came out. I mean,
7 people have been just wonderful. But, we still have
8 our daughter.

9 MR. TURRELL: Well, Mr. Schilling, I am not
10 going to make this too long. I will ask a few
11 questions and we will go around and just have a few
12 questions for you.

13 MR. SCHILLING: Okay.

14 MR. TURRELL: You said basically that two or
15 three minutes after you departed the Fort when the
16 weather kicked up. And how long or can you estimate
17 how much time had elapsed from the time you left to the
18 time you flipped over?

19 MR. SCHILLING: I really don't have any idea.
20 I remember thinking when the wind, it started raining
21 and the wind is blowing, I remember thinking, you know,
22 he could turn around and go back. Because we hadn't
23 been out that long. But, now having thought that,
24 that doesn't mean much of anything. But, so, I don't
25 know. It couldn't have been, we were not close to

1 shore. I mean, we weren't close enough to be able to
2 swim back, if you could swim in that, those conditions.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

4 MR. SCHILLING: Which you would have had been
5 pretty credible swimmer to do that.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And could you describe to
7 us where on the boat you were sitting when this
8 occurred?

9 MR. SCHILLING: We were sitting, okay, as you
10 walk into the boat, I don't know --

11 MR. TURRELL: Would you like to draw it?

12 MR. SCHILLING: No, I can just, yeah, I mean,
13 I can do it.

14 (Pause.)

15 MR. SCHILLING: I can never remember what is
16 port and starboard and whatever on a boat.

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18 MR. SCHILLING: All right. Let's use this as
19 the plot of that.

20 (Pause.)

21 MR. SCHILLING: We were sitting here. And our
22 daughter and Andrew were sitting here. And there was
23 nobody, we were the last ones, I mean, it would have
24 been like that. So, we were, we were the last four on
25 this side, and there were two people here.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 MR. SCHILLING: And then there was Andrew and
3 Corrine was right across from me.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And where was the operator
5 of the, the boat operator?

6 MR. SCHILLING: The boat, boat operator's
7 station was right here.

8 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

9 MR. SCHILLING: And the guy who was like mate,
10 was here, so that the guy who was like the mate or
11 whatever, he was kind of standing like in the middle or
12 whatever.

13 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And you mentioned that in
14 the water, you were clinging to a life jacket.

15 MR. SCHILLING: Yeah, I mean, the life
16 preserver, yeah, they were like, they were like square,
17 something, floats, or some sort. I don't know, they
18 had been under the seat, you know, nobody mentioned
19 about getting them, but, I don't know if it would have
20 made any difference, that much anyway, once it flipped
21 over.

22 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

23 MR. SCHILLING: But, yeah, so I saw one
24 floating near me, I was holding onto the thing and I
25 was able to grab that. And I thought, well, this will

1 help. Well, it wouldn't hold up somebody like me.
2 But, it helps if I had that on. And then there was one
3 near my wife.

4 MR. TURRELL: You said it was a square float.
5 Square --

6 MR. SCHILLING: No, cushion, had like, it
7 could have gone over your head, if I remember right. I
8 mean, it wasn't one of those, like parachute looking
9 things or anything. It was just like a, I don't know,
10 a square, it didn't look all that substantial, but I am
11 assuming it probably would have been okay to keep
12 somebody up. I mean, you know, I don't know that.
13 Again, I am not a sailor.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

15 MR. SCHILLING: And so then another one came
16 very clear to me and my wife was up there paddling
17 around and I was trying to reach her, too, and so I
18 grabbed it, and started to throw it to her, but, just
19 at the time I started to throw it to her, it washed
20 away from me. So, I lost that. But, again, luckily,
21 the waves had pushed her closer to me and I grabbed her
22 foot.

23 MR. TURRELL: When you came onboard the boat
24 and the mate was standing there, telling you were to
25 sit, or did he instruct you both where to sit at all?

1 MR. SCHILLING: No.

2 MR. TURRELL: Was there any instructions given
3 as to life jackets or safety?

4 MR. SCHILLING: No.

5 MR. TURRELL: And was there any radio noise or
6 did you see the radio at all?

7 MR. SCHILLING: Yeah, they were talking on the
8 radio, the guy that was steering the boat. I don't
9 know if I want to call him a captain or not. It is such
10 a little boat. But, I think he was talking to the,
11 well, I won't say, the guy up by the gate had a radio,
12 too, and so I assumed that he was talking to him about
13 getting people, in fact, I know he must have been,
14 because he was saying that there was a couple of other
15 people coming down. He was asking how many were coming
16 down and I remember him saying they had room for like
17 two more or three more or something.

18 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall if it was the same
19 boat that turned over as the one that had the rivet
20 that came loose?

21 MR. SCHILLING: Oh, yes.

22 MR. TURRELL: It was the same.

23 MR. SCHILLING: Oh, yes. It was same, you
24 know, the same boat and same captain and the same mate.

25 MR. TURRELL: Did you see the same nut loose

1 or did you have a chance to observe?

2 MR. SCHILLING: It wasn't, it was not there,
3 it hadn't been put back, I don't think.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

5 MR. SCHILLING: But, it wasn't on the floor
6 laying there.

7 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So was water still coming
8 out of it?

9 MR. SCHILLING: Well, no, I didn't notice it
10 coming back. That it was doing it that.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

12 (Pause.)

13 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

14 MR. SCHILLING: I can't lose two in one day.

15 (Pause.)

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Let's see here. Coast
17 Guard Commander.

18 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Sir, do you
19 remember which way the vessel rolled, you said you were
20 sitting on the left side, or the port side?

21 MR. SCHILLING: Right, we were sitting right,
22 it was going that way. We were sitting here and it
23 rolled this way. So, it rolled, the wind was blowing,
24 I don't know which directions we were out there, but it
25 was blowing, yeah, from this way and it rolled this

1 way.

2 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: So you were
3 sitting and looking across and that is the side that
4 went down.

5 MR. SCHILLING: That is right. Yeah.

6 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: You mentioned
7 that the, they kind of hurried you folks on the ferry,
8 it was getting ready to leave. Was there any mention
9 of why they were hurrying? Was there any mention of
10 what --

11 MR. SCHILLING: Well, obviously the weather
12 was coming up and they wanting to get us over there and
13 come back and get the other folks.

14 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Did they
15 mention that specifically?

16 MR. SCHILLING: No, they didn't say, I don't
17 think so. I don't remember it specifically, it was
18 just, it was real obvious that was the case.

19 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: There was a
20 general feeling that we need to get out of here.

21 MR. SCHILLING: Oh, yeah, because they wanted
22 to, because when they pulled out, I remember him
23 yelling that, or talking into the radio and saying, we
24 will be right back to get the others, you know, I don't
25 know what you can construe from that, but, I mean --

1 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: And you
2 mentioned that, he was talking with the other gentleman
3 on the radio and he said there was room for two or
4 three more.

5 MR. SCHILLING: Right. There were only, I
6 think there was, I don't know, he counted, not, not the
7 guy that was steering but the other guy counted, and I
8 think he said there were 19 or something to the other
9 one, and so they sent two other guys down, and they
10 were kind of doing, they were kind of going slow and
11 taking some pictures, as they were going, and they were
12 waving them on to hurry up to get on.

13 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

14 MR. SCHILLING: So, they got on and we
15 immediately started back.

16 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Did the
17 operator of the vessel issue any emergency instructions
18 or anything? Was there ever any time?

19 MR. SCHILLING: No.

20 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: It just
21 happened real quickly.

22 MR. SCHILLING: Not, not really, not that I,
23 not that I heard anyway. As far as I know, the answer
24 is no. It just happened. I mean, the guy, the guy, you
25 know, steering the boat, was turning it, as I said, so

1 it was sideways into the, into the wind. But, other
2 than that, he didn't say anything.

3 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: That is pretty
4 much all I have so far.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Our prayers go with you
6 and your family.

7 MR. SCHILLING: I know, I mean, that is -- I
8 appreciate that. It is obviously not something you
9 wanted to happen. Lord. I remember as we were going,
10 maybe I said this, I don't know, sorry, all I remember
11 is when it started going over the first time, and
12 making that, and I remember thinking, oh, I wish I
13 would wake up from this. It was a nightmare, such an
14 incredibly odd. You think of your kids dying in car
15 accidents and studying, when they were studying and at
16 Purdue University and something is doing to happen to
17 them when they are in Europe, and --

18 MR. TURRELL: Officer?

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

20 MR. TURRELL: One last question I have and we
21 will let you out here.

22 MR. SCHILLING: That is fine.

23 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall anyone have a
24 video camera or camera taking, anyone taking pictures,
25 do you recall anyone --

1 MR. SCHILLING: The two guys that got on at
2 the end and they seemed to be, you know, they were not
3 speaking English. They could have been, I couldn't
4 hear enough because of the, you know, we were staying
5 in the back and whatever, but they were taking pictures
6 and doing normal tourist stuff. They had, they had
7 regular cameras.

8 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall -

9 MR. SCHILLING: No, one had, I think one had
10 an extra lens with him, maybe or something.

11 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall maybe if they may
12 have taken a picture of the boat and passengers, do you
13 recall, I mean, can you --

14 MR. SCHILLING: I don't have any idea. They
15 were taking pictures when they were coming down to the
16 boat, but whether they took a picture of the boat or
17 not, I don't have any idea.

18 MR. TURRELL: And were they Asian, were they
19 Hispanic, were they --

20 MR. SCHILLING: I would say they were probably
21 Eastern --

22 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Maybe we will be able to
23 get the camera.

24 MR. SCHILLING: I understand, I understand why
25 you are asking that, you know.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Well, sir, we will
2 conclude the interview here. If there is any other
3 questions, just acknowledge that this has been tape
4 recorded for accuracy.

5 MR. SCHILLING: Correct, it has been tape
6 recorded for whatever accuracy I could provide.

7 MR. TURRELL: Thank you.

8 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)